REMARKS / ARGUMENTS

In complete response to the Final Office Action dated June 6, 2006, on the above identified application, reconsideration is respectfully requested. Claims 22-25 are pending in this application.

With this amendment, claim 22 is amended.

Support for this amendment may be found in the specification, wherein it states that "thanks to the geometry of the junction pieces, the welds are made outside the pieces to be connected, they may therefore be used for small diameters" (*page 9, lines 14-16*).

Further support for this amendment may be found in Figures 2 –7, which clearly indicate junction pieces with geometric configurations, of unitary construction, that require no internal welding.

Claim Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. § 102:

Claims 22 and 23 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102 (b) as being anticipated by Bland et al. '747. Applicants respectfully submit that claims 22 and 23 are not anticipated by Bland et al. '747.

Bland et al. '747 requires the *welding* of a "back-up ring on the inner surface of the first steel pipe" (see column 2, lines 21-24, Figures 1-5, and see also claims 1 and 4-7). Bland et al. '747 requires that the back-up bar (or ring) is *welded* to a first member, then, "after welding, the member **11** having the back-up bar **12** welded thereto was dipped in molten aluminum and a coating of aluminum **14** was obtained" (see column 2, lines 24-26, see also claims 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7).

The instant invention clearly teaches away from the method disclosed in Bland et al. '747, as indicted in a discussion of the problems with the current state of the art (as exemplified in Bland et al. '747), it states that:

> "This is because, when the pieces to be connected are protected before welding, the welding destroys the protection of the welded region and adversely affects the protection of the adjacent region. When this

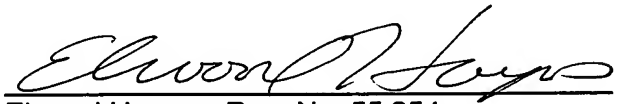
protection is applied after welding, the protection is then produced over a filler material with a different composition and/or structure; in this case, the diffusion speeds of the various chemical elements are affected leading to different and often reduced quality and thickness in the welded region with respect to the base material unaffected by the welding. Furthermore, given the available welding material, the piece to be welded to the support cannot be fastened for small-diameter pipework. It is therefore not possible to protect junctions directly on site" *(page 2, lines 24-38).*

Claim 22 of the present invention, as currently amended, explicitly requires "joining pieces having a geometry such that there is no internal welding required on said joining pieces." All elements of the independent claim are not found in Bland et al. '747, and therefore the rejection should be withdrawn as improper.

CONCLUSION

Accordingly, it is believed that the present application now stands in condition for allowance. Early notice to this effect is earnestly solicited. Should the Examiner believe a telephone call would expedite the prosecution of the application, he is invited to call the undersigned attorney at the number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,



Elwood Haynes, Reg. No. 55,254

Date: **August 4, 2006**

Air Liquide
2700 Post Oak Blvd., Suite 1800
Houston, Texas 77056
Phone: (713) 624-8954
Fax: (713) 624-8950

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I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service with sufficient postage as first class mail in an envelope addressed to: Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450, on this 4th day of August, 2006.

Diana Guzman